

Oklahoma City Free Press

Opinion: Stitt loves ‘out-of-state special interest groups’ in sch choice movt

By George Lang

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Gov. Kevin Stitt wants Oklahoma’s laws to be free of outside influence when it suits his agenda, but when Oklahoma’s conservative-dominated legislature advances ready-made, cut-and-paste social legislation from other states or lobbying groups, Stitt practically greets these grifters at the border.

In his Feb. 7 State of the State address, Stitt bemoaned the passage of State Question 788, which brought medical marijuana to the state through a 2018 ballot initiative. Oklahomans overwhelmingly voted for medical marijuana by a margin of 57-43, but Stitt thinks they were deceived, too unsophisticated to understand the state question.

“When Oklahomans voted for medical marijuana, they were literally sold a bill of goods,” Stitt said. “The state question was misleading and it has tied our hands as we regulate the industry. Because of that state question, Oklahoma charges just \$2,500 for a commercial license.”

“This is a perfect example of why we need to make sure initiative petitions represent Oklahomans and not out-of-state special interest groups,” he said.

Stitt then went on to speak glowingly of California’s system, which can cost somewhere in the upper six figures depending on the scale of the operation. So, Stitt wants to raise the barriers for entry in an industry that has brought in \$14 million in licensing fees to the state and over \$800 million in sales in 2020.

Not only is his desire to hobble a thriving Oklahoma industry anti-capitalist, it is anti-democratic. Stitt does not believe in democracy if it will not bend to his will.

So when House Bill 1647 failed to pass in the state Legislature, Stitt threw a fit over the defeat.

Known as the Oklahoma Empowerment Act, an obvious snake-oil brand meant to sell “a bill of goods,” the bill would have drained state funding from Oklahoma’s public schools for the purpose of sending students to charter or private institutions.

Stitt and his secretary of education, Ryan Walters, engaged in a disinformation campaign that, if it had found success, would have pulled funding away from public schools serving rural areas where no charter or private schools exist. Walters, an opportunist who once was a popular teacher in McAlester Public Schools before turning his back on his profession and his former students, went to town on every public school bogeyman he could find, including Critical Race Theory.

“In Oklahoma our schools will not go woke,” Walters tweeted ungrammatically on March 17. Since “woke” is now a multipurpose epithet used by conservatives against anyone desiring social progress, it was utterly meaningless, but it spoke to the brazenness with which Stitt ran his campaign against Oklahoma’s children.

Fortunately, not all of Stitt’s allies in the Legislature were swayed. The bill failed 22-24 on March 23, and Stitt released a temper tantrum of a statement in response.

“It is deeply concerning that so many voted to deny parents and students choices and keep them trapped in a system that has failed many Oklahoma children and left our state 49th in the nation in education,” Stitt said.

Thing is, it is now 2022, and Stitt is now in his fourth year as governor. With that amount of time in office, he does not get to pretend that a system that “failed many Oklahoma children” is not his to let fail.

This petulant false leader does not want to face his failure as governor, so he tries to kneecap Oklahoma’s public schools so that the next Epic Charter Schools could fleece the state.

“I will never stop fighting to empower parents and fund students over systems,” Stitt or outside agitator Carly Atchison wrote on Twitter after the defeat.

Funny thing about that language: it is the exact wording used in tweets this week by Corey DeAngelis, a leading national figure in Libertarian organizations such as the Cato Institute and the National Director of Research for the American Federation for Children, which is an American federation for school choice grifters.

DeAngelis is the kind of anti-government zealot who retweets Libertarians who say things like, “When are tax dollars EVER ‘spent well’?” On March 29, he tweeted, “BREAKING: Pennsylvania House Education Committee just passed a bill to fund students instead of systems.”

That is almost exactly how Stitt put it, which shows that Stitt does not have as much of a problem with “out-of-state special interest groups” as he would like Oklahomans to believe.